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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8964  
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 000693

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/WE, EUR/RPM, EUR/ERA, S/CT AND S/WCI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/13/2019

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BE](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: CONCERNS ABOUT SECURITY MAIN OBSTACLE TO BELGIAN  
RESETTLEMENT OF GUANTANAMO DETAINEES

REF: A. BRUSSELS 648

[1](#)B. BRUSSELS 268

[1](#)C. BRUSSELS 679

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Wayne Bush, reason 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism, Thomas Baekelandt, told Charge on May 13 that Belgium's main concern about taking detainees from Guantanamo is the risk to Belgian and European security. He also said he would want to know why the U.S. could not accept any particular detainee. Charge replied that Belgium will make its own decisions on individuals, and should not dwell on abstract, hypothetical questions about whether individuals could be admitted to the United States. The U.S. would undoubtedly have to continue to contend with the most difficult cases, and the USG would share complete information on detainees Belgium is asked to take. Baekelandt said that the GOB will consult with its European partners in evaluating specific detainees, and would share information with Schengen partners on any detainees accepted. He said the Belgians will want to have a good understanding with the United States about sharing information the USG provides. Charge wondered whether Belgium might consider the 17 Uygur detainees as good, low risk candidates for resettlement in Belgium. Baekelandt said that he sees no reason not to consider taking the Uygurs, and offered to float the idea informally with others in the government. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Charge explained to Baekelandt our concerns about the impact of the Administrator General of State Security of Belgium, Alan Winants', extremely cautious statements about resettling of detainees (ref C). He said that such public statements, before the facts about any particular case are known, make it more difficult to achieve what Belgium has urged many times, that is, closure of Guantanamo. However, he said, the USG had heard Winants' concerns that North African or Middle Eastern detainees could be a rallying point for domestic Islamist radicals. He wondered how the GOB would view a request to resettle a number of the Uygur detainees, since they are not considered to pose a threat to Belgium or European countries.

[1](#)3. (C) Baekelandt was well-informed about the status of the Uygur detainees. He said that they had been subject to an order of habeas corpus but that the USG has won an appeal that overturned an order that they be released into the United States. The USG will have to explain why, if the United States cannot give them a visa, presumably on security grounds, they should be settled in Belgium. He reiterated Winants' concerns about the possibility that resettled detainees, especially from the Middle East, would increase Belgium's problems with radicalized individuals. Only a few such individuals are sufficient to cause major problems, he said. Baekelandt was also aware of the Chinese government's likely strong reaction to any country's acceptance of the Uygurs for resettlement.

14. (C) Baekelandt suggested that the issue of U.S. non-acceptance of the Uygurs was an obstacle to resettlement in Belgium. Charge noted that the same question could be asked of any of the detainees held at Guantanamo. The USG in all likelihood would have to continue to deal judiciously with the most difficult cases, including those individuals who pose a continued security threat. We have called on allies to help solve a difficult problem, he said, and Belgium's leaders have said they want to assist. An inordinate focus on why the United States could not take any particular detainee brings into question whether the GOB will be able to discuss resettlement of any of them in good faith.

The important issue, the Charge insisted, is what the impact would be in Belgium. The USG is prepared to share the results of its review of the detainees, now ongoing, and to give the Belgian government every opportunity to evaluate the risks and find ways to mitigate them. In that regard, there may be many good choices for Belgium among the detainees and it may be a good idea to speak up early to take the best candidates for Belgium before they go elsewhere. Accepting some detainees early would be a powerful symbol of Belgium's willingness to assist, he concluded.

15. (C) Following this exchange, Baekelandt began to focus more closely on the security issues. He said that among the criteria Belgium would use to make a decision is whether the detainee wants to go to Belgium, what is in the USG's files on the person, and Belgian State Security's own evaluation of the detainee's history. There may be some detainees with some connections to Belgium, such as Ahmad Muhammad Al-Masa'udi, aka Hisham Sliti, but he said these might also

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be among the higher-risk detainees. He is also concerned that the Guantanamo experience may have radicalized some detainees who otherwise might have been low risk. He sees a necessity for monitoring by State Security of detainees resettled in Belgium.

16. (C) Noting the USG-EU consultations on the detainee issue, Baekelandt said that the GOB will be seeking information about detainees under active consideration from other EU countries, especially those in the Schengen area, before it commits to resettlement. Belgium will want to share information with its EU partners and would like to have a clear understanding with the United States on that. He said that he understands such discussions are under way. Baekelandt did insist, however, that the decision to resettle detainees is a national one that Belgium will make for itself. After Belgium takes a detainee, he said, it will inform Schengen partners about limitations on his free movement in Belgium or in the Schengen area, if any. Belgium is also looking at ways to confer a legal status on resettled detainees that avoids leaving them in a legal limbo. Belgium wants to complete that process by early July, when Baekelandt said he understands the USG review will be finished and the USG will want to begin serious discussions about particular detainees.

17. (C) Summing up, Baekelandt said that while political considerations will be important, security issues will be paramount in the detainee cases. He said he sees no reason not to consider taking in the Uygurs, but still would like to know why the United States is not willing to resettle them in the U.S. The GOB's idea, he said, is that Belgium would accept those persons for whom the USG is "really in a fix" for resettlement. Charge reacted, saying that that is not exactly the kind of limited help the USG is seeking. Baekelandt's reaction: "OK, just not too many." He said he was looking forward to Ambassador Fried's visit to Brussels on May 18 and would help to organize a useful meeting for him.

BUSH

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